DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 305 492 CE 052 230

TITLE Basic Principles for Adult Education.
INSTITUTION Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Washington, DC. Div. of Adult Education.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Adult Education; *Adult Literacy; *Basic Skills; Educational Needs; *Educational Principles; Functional Literacy; Illiteracy; *Literacy Education; Program Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

A basic set of principles for adult education reflects what should be found in each state and local program. First, basic skills should be mastered by all students. Second, course content should be directly related to learner, labor market, and community needs. Third, partnership efforts should be expanded and strengthened. Fourth, programs must have a system that ensures accountability. If each adult education program addresses these principles, major strides will be made in responding to the needs of the U.S. economy and the individuals served. The current interest in adult education is the result of efforts of public and private groups; media support is crucial to these efforts. The national adult education program, begun under the authority of the Economic Opportunity Act, has been continued through the Elememtary and Secondary Education Act and, most recently, the Adult Education Amendments of 1988. The adult education field has also responded to findings of large numbers of functionally incompetent adults by developing and using life skills curricula. The emphasis on functional competence has also raised the issue of what literacy or illiteracy is. Findings of literacy studies indicate that by any measure or definition the number of adults in need of higher level literacy skills is large. Application of the basic principles for adult education is one key method of guaranteeing more effective programs. (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED305492

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR ADULT EDUCATION

Currently, there is great interest in adult literacy as the realization grows that skilled and knowledgeable adults are key to economic and social success of the country. The realization that adult illiteracy is both a cause and a symptom of low economic status surfaced in the mid 1960's as America undertook the "war on poverty."

As we prepare for the future, there are some issues and needs that must be addressed if adult education expects to increase its effectiveness:

- o agreement must be reached on the definition of adult illiteracy,
- o we must determine the source and availability of all federal resources allocated for this special population.

These areas of research are being conducted at the Federal level. The results of these two studies should be of considerable assistance to States as resources are mobilized to address the problem. However, there are several ways State and local programs can strengthen and improve existing efforts. These include:

- o organizational and financial support;
- o staff development opportunities for all practitioners;
- o special attention for "at risk" populations;
- o accurate assessment of learner needs, accomplishments, and goals;
- o better coordination with other adult-serving programs; and
- o improved program accountability.

To that end, a basic set of principles for adult education instructional programs is proposed. These principles were developed with input from 150 adult education managers, trainers, teachers, and consultants representing 48 States and territories plus a variety of national organizations.

These principles are intended to reflect what should be found in each adult education program, regardless of the special population or individual to be served. They should guarantee to learners, employers, and all persons involved that every program will have as its primary focus the attainment of applied basic skills and wherever appropriate that skills are related to labor market and community concerns. It should also guarantee that resosurces will be coordinated through partnerships with other organizations, agencies, and businesses and that standards of accountability exist which will ensure that the programs are effective.

CE052230

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PRINCIPLE #1: BASIC SKILLS SHOULD BE MASTERED BY ALL STUDENTS

The American people are insisting that all students achieve mastery of the basic skills. Basic skills include reading, writing, mathematics, other language skills, work maturity, life competency, and problem-solving skills. Many employers and educators also include computer literacy, knowing how to learn, and work ethics as well. Although mastery of these skills may be a challenge, the goal is an important one. Programs should diagnose each student's needs, tailor a learning plan, and provide a skills report card to students. The attainment of skills should be documented for the student, for future employers, and to provide data for State and local program evaluations. As Lamar Alexander, 1986 Chairman of the National Governor's Association wrote, "The Nation and the States and School districts need better report cards about results, and about what students know and can do."

From the student's perspective, learning basic skills is usually less difficult when learned in a real-life situation. For example, a bilingual vocational training program in Chinatown, New York City teaches students to become chefs while at the same time teaching them English. The program has a high student completion rate, a high success rate in teaching basic skills, and a waiting list of future employers.

CHECKLIST FOR ACTION: PRINCIPLE #1

****

- o Diagnose each learner's needs and strengths;
- o Provide each learner frequent progress reports;
- o Make sure basic skills are applied in meaningful ways; and
- o Provide students with a Basic Skills Performance Report.

****

PRINCIPLE #2: COURSE CONTENT SHOULD BE DIRECTLY RELATED TO LEARNER, LABOR MARKET, AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

Successful programs are those that fulfill needs -- needs of the student -- needs of future employers -- needs of others with whom the student will live. Business and community involvement can help ensure that programs meet all of those needs and that the adult learner is well equipped for success. Therefore, local employers and community leaders should be involved in planning, evaluation and establishing goals.

CHECKLIST FOR ACTION: PRINCIPLE #2

****

- o Involve community and labor market leaders in planning and evaluating programs;
- o Develop a systematic review process to ensure programs remain relevant and responsive to local labor market and community needs;
- o Assess student learning needs and expectations;
- o Provide a variety of instructional techniques to meet the needs and styles of students; and
- o Develop or adopt new curriculum and delivery techniques when needed.

****

PRINCIPLE #3: PARTNERSHIP EFFORTS SHOULD BE EXPANDED AND STRENGTHENED

A challenge to adult education at all levels is to keep abreast of the changes taking place in the labor market, social services, and society in general. Programs must be responsive to these changes. An important resource is the development of partnerships between the public and private sectors. With these partnerships, we not only ensure that the programs are current but that the students are as well-served as possible.

Partnership possibilities are numerous and should include coordination with agencies that provide a wide variety of social services. Examples include: State and local welfare programs, job training programs, and correctional institutions. Libraries, business and industrial employers, and educational agencies also make excellent partnerships. Partnerships with the K-12 education system can be strengthened. Family literacy programs are an excellent example of such partnerships.

Partnership efforts bring a number of benefits to adult learners, as additional services can be provided to students. Services such as family counseling, job training, and financial benefits can enhance recruiting and retaining learners. Partnerships may also increase public awareness and support for adult education prorams. As Michael Usdan, President of the Institute for Educational Leadership points out: "As a society we can no longer afford the luxury of turfmanship." We need to work together.

CHECKLIST FOR ACTION: PRINCIPLE #3

****

- o Search for ways to expand and strengthen existing partnerships;
- o Examine the potential for new partnerships;
- o Involve other public agencies in the deliver/coordination of education services;

- o Share resources with other agencies; and
- o Let partnerships take credit for and help publicize and support your program.

****

PRINCIPLE #4: PROGRAMS MUST HAVE A SYSTEM THAT ASSURES ACCOUNTABILITY

As public and private institutions invest more and more of their resources in adult learning activities, programs must meet requirements for greater accountability. Without a well-developed system for assuring accountability, increased and continuing support for programs may not be achieved.

The Adult Education Act requires each State to develop and implement a system of accountability for State-administered adult programs. State and local standards are usually developed which ensure: targeted populations are served; programs are effective; curriculum is relevant; student assessment occurs; and interagency collaboration takes place where appropriate. Standards should be used to determine whether programs should be expanded or terminated.

While this is required in State administered programs, non-profit, volunteer, and private sector programs should adopt similar goals and standards for themselves. Adult educators and program directors should ensure that the standards adopted provide measures of accountability. Measurements of accountability to consider could include: measurable attainment of basic skills of students; student and community evaluations of the program; student placement rates in the labor market; cost effectiveness of the program; rate of removal from welfare rolls; interagency agreements; and documentation of partnerships with the community.

A good accountability system will reflect and be responsive to the broad spectrum of adult education clientele: adult learners, supporting agencies, program partners, employers, and the community. Such a system provides the base for sound decisions for: student and volunteer recruiting; goal development; program funding and delivery; and research and training needs.

CHECKLIST FOR ACTION: PRINCIPLE #4

****

- o Develop standards that measure and evaluate the program;
- o Be attentive to all of adult education's clientele;
- o Use the accountability system to improve decision making;
- o Working with the community; and
- o Share program goals and standards with the community.

****

In summary, effective adult education instructional programs are those which:

1. enable all students to master basic skills;

2. provide relevant courses to meet student, employer, and community needs;

3. set standards of accountability which will ensure program effectiveness; and

4. strengthen and expand partnership efforts.

These four principles are familiar to adult educators and tutors across the nation. Many State and local programs reflect these goals in philosophy statements. However, there is uneveness in the execution of these goals, and the time has come to unite efforts to achieve these ends. If we can ensure that each adult education program addresses these principles, we will have made major strides in responding to the needs of the American economy and the individuals we serve.

To examine these Principles further, it may be useful to look at the history or "the roots" of the current interest in adult education. Much of today's heightened interest in adult literacy is the result of efforts by many public and private groups. Beginning in the early 1980's the American Library Association, Laubach Literacy Action, and the Literacy Volunteers of America, joined forces with groups such as the Business Council for Effective Literacy, the Advertising Council, and others to urge public support for adult literacy efforts.

Crucial to these efforts has been the support of the media. ABC-TV and Public Broadcasting System sponsored PLUS (Project Literacy U.S.). As a result of PLUS, over 380 local literacy Task Forces have been formed. The American Newspaper Publishers Association has hosted literacy symposiums to help describe the problem and enlist support for literacy efforts. Public groups such as the National Governors Association and the Education Commission on the States have been active in literacy efforts.

In 1965 the national adult education program began under the authority of the Economic Opportunity Act. In 1966, the program was incorporated into the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The goal of the Act was to provide basic skills needed for job training, first employment, or better employment opportunities. The program enrolled less than a half million adults in 1966. In 1970, Congress added as a priority of the Act, education for high school completion. By 1974, enrollment had grown to over one million students annually. In 1988, 2,983,279 adults were enrolled in Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and Adult Secondary programs in State programs.

While it is impossible to determine the precise number of learners enrolled in programs sponsored by volunteer groups and community based organizations because there is no uniform method of reporting to a central agency. We do know over 67,000 volunteers were serving in State administered programs in 1988.

Adult education programs governed and administered by States were provided with $136.3 million in Federal funds in 1989. These funds are distributed to the States on a formula basis. State and local support is added to the Federal support. Over 73,000 adult educators provided adult education instruction in these programs in 1988. Programs are offered in community settings such as learning centers, churches, high schools, community colleges, libraries, community centers, prisons, union halls, private business, industry and more.

Today adult education is defined by the Adult Education Amendments of 1988 as: "services or instruction below the college level for adults who are not enrolled in secondary school, who lack sufficient mastery of basic educational skills to enable them to function effectively in society,...and whose lack of mastery of basic skills result in an inability to speak, read, or write the English language." Emphasis is now placed on services to special populations such as homeless and institutionalized adults, the educationally disadvantaged, and immigrants. Currently, workplace literacy has a high priority, as does English literacy and family literacy. Congress has mandated increased accountability for the use of Federal funds through evaluation and student assessment.

<u>The Act requires that programs be designed to</u>:

1. enable adults to acquire the basic educational skills necessary for literate functioning;
2. provide adults with sufficient basic education to enable them to benefit from job training and retraining programs and obtain and retain productive employment so that they might more fully enjoy the benefits and responsibilities of citizenship; and
3. allow adults, who so desire, to continue their education to at least the level of completion of secondary school.

<u>Definition of Literacy</u>

In 1975 the Adult Performance Level (APL) study of adult functional competency reported that a large percentage of adults were functionally incompetent in a variety of knowledge areas, including reading 21.7%, computation 32.9%, problem solving 28.0% and consumber economics 29.4%. This was reflected in adults' inabilities to read job notices, locate needed services, make change, etc. The adult education field responded to these findings by developing and using "life skills" curriculums, and in a few States by developing new methods for planning programs and assessing needs and outcomes.

The emphasis on "functional competence" also raised an issue about what is literacy or illiteracy? Since 1975 there have been a number of attempts to answer this question. The Bureau of the Census estimated the Nation's illiteracy rate at 0.5% for 1980. This figure was based upon a sample of self reported non-readers. If this rate were applied to the 191 million adults age 14 years and older in 1985, the estimated number of illiterates would be about 1 million.

Another study estimates an illiteracy rate of 13% for American adults 20 years old and over, or 17 to 21 million persons. This estimate is based on the English Language Proficiency Survey (ELPS) conducted in 1982 by the Bureau of the Census and released by the U.S. Department of Education in 1985. The ELPS survey consisted of a selected national sample of 3,400 adults responding to written questions related to English comprehension.

Functional literacy definitions in the 1940's and 1950's used the level of skills that should be provided by a fifth or sixth grade eduacation. By the 1970's there were suggestions that a tenth or even a twelfth grade education was necessary. The Bureau of the Census estimated, in 1985, that 144 million persons were 25 years old and over; of these, 2.7% had completed less than 5 years of school (4 million persons); 7.5% had completed less than 8 years of school (11 million), and 26.1% had completed less than 12 years of school (38 million).

In 1985, The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released, Literacy: Profiles of America's Young Adults. This study, defined literacy as: Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential. The NAEP study characterized the literacy skills of young adults in terms of three "literacy scales," prose literacy, document literacy, and quantitative literacy.

A key finding of the NAEP study is that many individuals are neither totally "illiterate" nor fully "literate" for a technologically advanced society. While over 95% of young adults adequately perform tasks at the lower levels, sizable numbers appear unable to do well in tasks of moderate complexity. Only a relatively small percentage of this group is estimated to perform at levels typified by the more complex and challenging tasks.

Examination of these literacy studies brings a growing understanding that by any measure or by any definition, the number of adults in need of higher level literacy skills is indeed large. Further examination only points to the need for increased efforts, increased resources, and more effective programs. One of the key methods of guaranteeing more effective programs is the application of the Basic Principles for Adult Education.

Prepared by:
Division of Adult Education
Office of Vocational and Adult Education
U.S. Department of Education
March 1989